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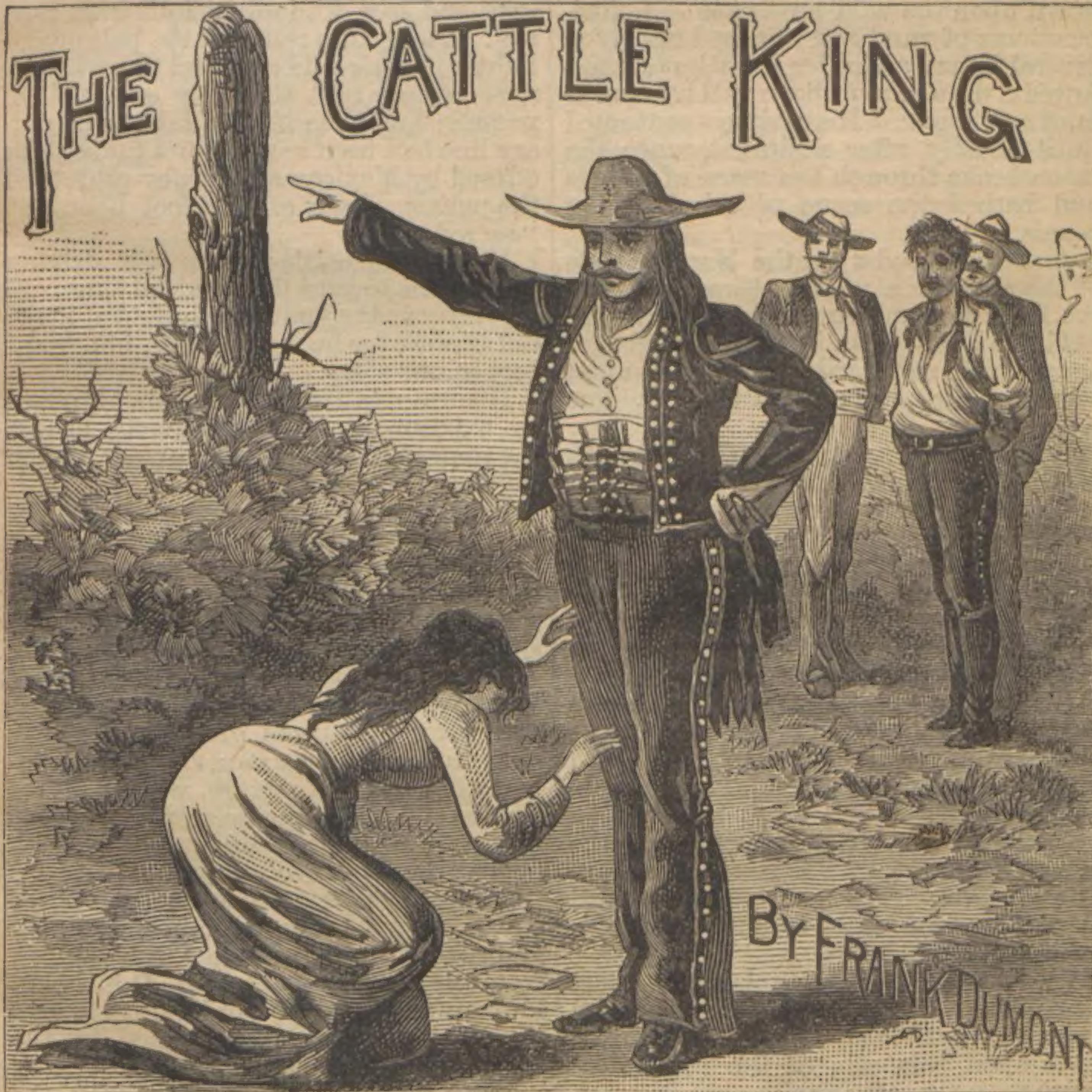
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AGAIN WINONA KNELT AT THE FEET OF THE OUTLAW.

The Cattle King;

OR,

CORTINA'S RIGHT BOWER.

BY FRANK DUMONT,
AUTHOR OF "WILD FIRE," "BRANDED
HAND," "BLUE BLAZES," "EBONY
DAN," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A CRITICAL MOMENT.

THE moon had just silvered the waters of the Rio Grande River and partially dispelled the shadows that had settled down upon the wild landscape. A furious storm of wind and rain had raged for several hours, and after the calm that followed a deep gloom like a pall hung over land and water. The darkness continued until shortly after midnight, when the moon broke through the mass of clouds and bathed the scene with her silvery beams.

A person stood upon the Mexican side of the river at a point midway between the Rio Pecos and San Pedro River. He held the bridle of an impatient steed that pawed the soft earth, ever and anon snuffing the air and uttering a low whinny.

"You're acting very strange; what's the matter? Danger?"

The words were addressed to the horse by the young man, and as he peered across the river he seemed to find a reply to his question.

"You're right! I'll stake my life there's danger ahead; I never knew you to be mistaken, old fellow."

Directly across the stream he saw a dark moving mass that rapidly neared the waters of the river. He distinctly heard the sound of horses' hoofs and the subdued hum of voices:

As the moving mass drew nearer to the water's edge, the watcher upon the Mexican side of the river saw that the forward mass comprised cattle, followed by full a score of mounted men.

"Cattle-thieves!" he exclaimed; "just returning from a successful raid and crossing back into Mexico. Villains! once upon this side of the river they know they are safe from pursuit."

He led the horse into a clump of tall mesquite bushes, and the animal obeying

its master's voice, knelt upon the earth and lay crouched like a huge dog. The young man sought his weapons and grasping them firmly, breathlessly awaited the result of his discovery. From his place of concealment he obtained a good view of the river and point where he surmised the raiders would touch the Mexican shore.

The rascals were driving the cattle into the shallow stream, and were even now midway across the river. The herd of cattle were urged forward by the mounted men detailed for that purpose, while the remainder rode about forty rods behind, acting as a barrier between the herd and any who might follow in pursuit. Their rifles reflected the pale moonlight and their loud calls and unnecessary noise plainly told that they expected no pursuit; and even if they did, the boundary line had been reached and the asylum offered by Mexican supremacy prevented the pursuers from setting foot upon the "sacred soil."

While the cattle-thieves are driving their spoils toward the Mexican shore, we will observe the young man hidden in the tall bushes, for he is to play an important part in our story.

His features are handsome, but bronzed by exposure. A dark mustache shades the upper lip and gives the owner quite a military appearance.

This does not belie the young man, for Harry Powell is a son of Mars, though not clothed in the garb of a soldier. He is a lieutenant in the United States forces stationed at Fort Duncan on the American side of the river. At present his clothing comprises a well-worn coat of dark material, with vest to match; buckskin pants and heavy top-boots give him quite a semi-civilized appearance. A huge sombrero finishes the picture, while a broad leather belt holds the necessary weapons for safety while traveling over the roads in the "land of revolutions."

A few days previous to the opening of our story his horse—a most intelligent and valuable animal—had been stolen from the vicinity of the fort. It is a well-known fact that the border is in a continual state of agitation caused by the incursions of marauding bands.

These scoundrels penetrate into the border counties of Texas, drive large herds of horses and cattle across the Rio

Grande into Mexico and there dispose of the animals for good round sums. Although the animals are branded, it is next to impossible to recover them. Pursuit ends at the river, for the Mexican authorities will not allow armed Americans to follow the thieves into Mexico. Of course there is a very good reason for all this. The rascally Mexican alcaldes are in league with the robbers and wink at their crimes and share in the plunder. It has been proven beyond a doubt that a Mexican Governor named Cortinas was the head and front of a robber crew, and waxed fat upon the proceeds of the cattle-thieves and gave them an asylum at his own ranch.

Once in a great while a horse can be ransomed. Many valuable animals are thus stolen and an opportunity given to the owner to cross over and regain possession of the creature by paying down a good figure.

It was for this reason that Harry Powell had discarded his uniform and donned one resembling a ranchero. Obtaining a short leave of absence, he crossed the river, accompanied by a private of his command named Jacob Slaushorn, a stout German, eccentric and faithful in the extreme. Before starting upon the expedition, Powell was given to understand that his horse would be found at a certain ranch near San Fernando, a small Mexican town.

To his great joy he recovered his horse, and paid down the amount asked and started on his return trip. The rascally "Greaser" who had received the amount hastily gathered a few cut-throats and started in pursuit of the American and his companion, intending to again possess the horse and rob the two adventurous men from Texas.

Mid a howling storm that suddenly swept through that region, the banditti caught up to Powell and Jacob and after a short conflict, and aided by the gloom, Powell succeeded in eluding the guerrillas. Jacob disappeared in the chaparral, and when Harry finally reached the banks of the Rio Grande, his companion was nowhere to be seen, and his pursuers had evidently abandoned the chase.

The young American had just dismounted and was seeking a suitable place to ford the river when his horse, acting in a strange manner, had caused him to

seek an explanation, and to his astonishment he discovered the cattle-thieves on the opposite bank about to cross the river.

From his secluded point of observation he noted the landing of the raiders and saw the herd driven by. The Mexicans were all armed and mounted upon fleet mustangs.

Scarcely had the rascals disappeared with their drove when another detachment touched the shore and for a moment halted upon the bank.

Powell's eyes were riveted upon a central figure that seemed to bear a burden upon the pommel of his saddle.

As the moonbeams fell upon their persons, Harry saw that the white mass was the figure of a woman held in the arms of the horseman and that the woman in question was either passive to her fate or insensible.

The horseman was a tall, dark-featured man whose sombrero shaded his face in such a manner that Powell could not see the countenance distinctly, although the moon shone directly upon the group. As the cavalcade halted, the woman turned her features in such a manner that the hidden officer saw them quite plainly.

Powell uttered an exclamation. It was the face of a young and beautiful girl. Golden hair swept down upon garments white as snow. Her pale countenance denoted anguish, and her eyes were turned in an imploring manner toward the Texan shore.

"By Jove! the rascals have abducted an American girl. She's a prisoner in the hands of those Greasers," said Powell between his clinched teeth.

He placed his hand upon his horse to compel the steed to remain quiet, and again his revolver was grasped in a threatening manner.

About a dozen of the marauders were still in the river, allowing their mustangs to drink, while the remainder were gathered near the person with the captive, evidently listening to the commands he was uttering.

Suddenly the white-robed figure leaped from the saddle to the ground, and uttering one little scream broke away from the horsemen.

On the came and Powell's heart leaped as he saw the girl dashing directly toward the chaparral where he lay concealed.

A moment later and several Mexicans, springing from their saddles, started in pursuit. A tall ruffian had almost overtaken her, when Powell, darting from his hiding-place, met the fugitive. With a glad cry she rushed into his arms and was clasped securely, while, with his right hand, he leveled his revolver at the advancing desperadoes.

"Back, you dogs, or I will stretch you dead at my feet! Look up, miss! You are safe for the present," exclaimed Powell.

Without a word of warning, a bearded ruffian discharged a pistol full at the head of the American. The bullet whistled close to his temple, but, before the scoundrel could again raise his arm, Powell's revolver cracked and the yellow-skin pitched forward upon his face, clutching at the grass in his death-struggles.

CHAPTER II.

"HEMMED IN."

THE pistol-shot and the fall of the Mexican occurred almost instantaneously, and the mounted robbers sprung from their mustangs and hastened toward the spot.

A score of scowling Greasers surrounded the young American, who supported the girl with one arm and swept the circle of foes with the other hand grasping the polished weapon.

The fate of their comrade caused the cowardly miscreants to hesitate, and the daring young officer held the cut-throats at bay for full five minutes ere one of their number moved. As the remainder of the group reached the spot, a wild yell broke from their lips, and a dozen weapons flashed.

"Stand back, or I'll shoot the first that advances an inch toward me!" cried Powell.

The beautiful girl crept closer to him, and her face turned toward her champion imploring his assistance.

"Do not let them take me away," she whispered. "Save me from that man!" and her glance of terror plainly told that the object of her special dread was approaching.

A tall, swarthy man, attired in Mexican habiliments drew near the group. His appearance and swagger denoted that he was no ordinary personage.

A repulsive feature of this individual's appearance was the left eye. The pupil was entirely white, as if the sight had been destroyed by some accident. The other orb gleamed like the eye of a wild beast in the gloomy jungle. His face was quite dark and a black mustache of wiry hair covered thin, cruel lips, exposing the gleaming teeth behind them. The awful eye gave an expression to the man's features that was most diabolical—something of the look of a hyena. Powell knew by the manner in which the girl clung to him, shuddering and gasping, that the man approaching was her most dreaded foe.

In a moment he had thrust aside the Mexicans and stood before the young man and his charge.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the new-comer in a peculiar grating voice resembling the low warning of the rattlesnake about to strike. He turned his eyes full upon the young American as he spoke.

"It means that the young lady now in my care fled from these ruffians, and as she has implored my protection, I am bound to assist her even though I lose my life in the attempt.

Powell's attitude cowed the semicircle of men before him, and his clear ringing voice pronounced every word distinctly.

A jeering laugh escaped from the lips of the ferocious outlaw chief.

"You are an American," said he mockingly, "and you constitute yourself the protector of that young lady? Do you know the risk attending such an act? I wouldn't give that for your chance of living."

The Mexican snapped his fingers and then turning to his minions exclaimed:

"You are a nice set of men to allow a single man to bluff you in this manner. Why do you stand there like a lot of sticks? You are not fit to be members of the band; you are not fit to be under Evil Eye."

The speaker's voice betrayed no Spanish accent in thus haranguing his followers, but, on the contrary, showed plainly that the man, although displaying Mexican garments, was a renegade from the States.

Often had Powell heard the name of Evil Eye, the most crafty and daring raider that ever infested the southwestern bor-

der. He had often trailed the villain and his infamous gang to the Rio Grande, and longed to cross at the head of his detachment and give the raiders a taste of Yankee powder and bullets.

The very name of Evil Eye was a terror on the border, and his depredations were carried far into the western counties of Texas. Immense losses were inflicted upon the cattle-owners, and redress was beyond the reach of the unfortunate Texans. Often a pursuing party followed after the raiders, but beyond killing a few, or recovering part of the stolen stock, the pursuit ended at the river, while the rascals hurried over into the friendly arms of the alcalde or to the ranch of the robber governor.

Often had the famous cattle-thief been described and his peculiar eye pictured by those who had met the renowned outlaw. He had styled himself "King of the Cattle Thieves," and he certainly ruled the lawless band with despotic sway.

"This is the infamous Evil Eye," thought Powell, as he scrutinized the man and observed the optic that had gained the *sobriquet* for its owner. It certainly was an evil-looking eye, and an evil countenance acted as a setting to the "gem."

"You are an American," said the robber, again turning to Powell, "and you have interfered with my men. Either one of these entitle you to a speedy death. I never spare an American!" he hissed. "Return that girl instantly, and prepare to die!"

"Now, sir, hear me. I have undertaken to shield this lady from the scoundrels who pursued her. She has come to me for protection, and she will have it. As for returning this poor girl into your hands, you can take her, but not until you cross over my dead body."

With flashing eyes the young American faced the villains, and the trembling girl clung closer to him.

"Let them kill me with you," she whispered; "better death than the fate in store for me. He has stolen me from home, and Heaven only knows the miserable life to which he would consign me. Kill me, but do not let them take me from you."

"Fear not, my poor little one. I will not abandon you. We shall die here, if

needs be!" cried Harry, in the warmth of his excitement.

The outlaw chief waved his hand to the mongrel crew at his back, and a yell arose that would have delighted a Comanche Indian.

"Down with him!" cried Evil Eye. "Do not harm the girl, but hack that dog of an American into small pieces. Out with your knives and slash him into ribbons!"

The ruffians sprung toward the young man and attempted to surround him. Powell's finger rested upon the trigger of his revolver and the weapon cracked spitefully twice in quick succession, and a howl from two of the Mexicans told that the bullet had found a vital spot.

The ruffians in return blazed away, in spite of Evil Eye's orders, and several bullets grazed the bodies of the young couple.

"Give me one of your weapons if you have one to spare," cried the girl; "do not be afraid to trust me."

Harry placed the weapon in her hand and quickly produced another one from his belt.

"Quick; follow me!" he cried, and he sprung toward the clump of bushes, at the same time uttering a peculiar signal.

His faithful steed bounded from the depths of the wild undergrowth. Then a loud cry of rage broke from the lips of the ruffians, for with wonderful agility Harry was in the saddle; the next moment he had leaned forward, placed his arm about the girl's waist and lifted her to the pommel of his saddle. Almost simultaneously the intelligent brute wheeled suddenly around and dashed into the depths of the chaparral.

A howl of excitement arose from the Mexicans as they saw the American make for the interior country, and at least a score of the thieves on fleet mustangs followed in pursuit led by the outlaw chief.

Powell passing the chaparral finally gained a tract of wild country where the trees afforded a friendly shelter. Through this he made his way until at length he emerged into an open plain which he knew would be dangerous crossing.

His steed now began to show signs of fatigue and the Mexicans were rapidly gaining upon him. Suddenly he reined in the horse, and uttered a cry of aston-

ishment. A wide and deep chasm yawned directly before him, and like a barrier prevented further movement in that direction. A wild yell told that the Mexicans were aware of the dangerous place and now regarded the capture of the fugitives as a foregone conclusion.

CHAPTER III.

THE VULTURES' ROOST.

"WE are hemmed in!" cried Powell, "and our only chance of escape lies in turning and fighting our enemies."

On came the exultant ruffians, feeling that the American was now in their grasp. They discharged their weapons as they advanced upon the young couple, while Harry wheeled and faced the murderous gang.

One swarthy bandit raised a rifle and drew a bead upon the young officer, but ere the Greaser could discharge the weapon a sharp crack echoed close at hand, and a bullet went crashing into the brain of the mounted ruffian. Powell turned to ascertain who had fired the saving shot, when the howling pack of Mexicans dashed upon him, and in spite of his desperate struggles and the deadly execution of his revolver he was overpowered and secured.

Powell could not suppress his admiration for the young girl. She had fought like an Amazon in the short conflict. Nerved by despair, she had defended herself with the courage of a heroine.

But it was an unequal struggle, and Evil Eye's minions easily triumphed. The repulsive villain glared upon the prostrate young man, and once he raised foot as if to plant his heel upon Powell's face, but a grim smile played upon his evil countenance as he checked himself and then leered in a diabolical manner:

"I'll save you for something more pleasing to the members of my band. I won't kill you outright, you dog. No, I'll kill you by inches."

Powell made no reply, but correctly surmised that the villain contemplated inflicting some horrible tortures upon him.

One thing puzzled him greatly, and that was concerning the hidden marksman. He wondered that the Mexicans had not sought for the lurking-place of the fatal rifleman. But all thoughts upon the subject were abruptly dispelled by the bandit's orders.

"Bind the American upon one of the mustangs, and tie him fast, hand and foot. That's right. Now mount and away to the Vultures' Roost!"

Powell was secured upon the back of a mustang very much after the manner of the famed Mazeppa. His captors were in high glee, and handled the prisoner in a brutal manner.

Evil Eye assisted the girl upon the mustang belonging to the dead Mexican, and then seated himself upon the back of his own steed. He gave the word of command, and the cavalcade dashed away toward the low range of hills.

Powell's position was most excruciating, but he bore up bravely, and did not allow a groan to escape from his lips during that long and painful journey. Evil Eye never once left the side of his fair captive, and his confederates rode in a hollow square, thus hemming in the bandit chief and his prisoners.

The hours wore on until the horsemen reached a wild, mountainous district. Huge bowlders and giant cactus plants arose upon all sides, and the surface bore evidence of the mighty volcanic eruptions of bygone ages.

Throughout certain portions of Mexico, Arizona, and New Mexico, are to be found the remains and traces of wonderful dwellings perched among the cliffs and precipices. Savans agree that a race prior to the Peons and Aztecs occupied these dwellings. They were built upon ledges, and were reached by means of ladders. Once the ladders were drawn up by the inhabitants it was impossible to reach these almost impregnable fortresses on the cliffs.

The race of people inhabiting these mountain cities long since passed away, but their wonderful dwellings still remain, some in a good state of preservation, while others have crumbled away into sightless masses of debris.

It was toward one of these buildings upon the verge of a precipitous ledge that Evil Eye and his lawless crew made their way, and within its walls the cattle-thieves found a safe and secluded refuge. They had made great improvements in the mountain retreat. Instead of using ladders to reach the ledge, they had tunneled into the base of the cliff, and thus formed a passage that led in winding tunnels upward into the walled inclosure

above. This entrance was artfully covered up, and it was only by careful search among the masses of mesquite and cactus that it could be discovered by hostile parties.

Evil Eye feared no attack, for he was hand in glove with the authorities, yet the wily scoundrel had provided for a breach of friendship by fortifying his retreat in various ways, and undermining the cliff with underground exits.

The bandits dismounted and one of their number led the animals into a large chamber and there fastened them. Powell was released and allowed to stand erect, but his hands were secured. The entire party proceeded up the inclined passage and reached the open space of the walled inclosure. Two vicious-looking Mexicans led the girl toward a dismantled adobe building and placed her in charge of a wrinkled Indian hag, while Powell was thrust into a small hut with a swarthy Greaser for a guard, while the bandit chief and his followers partook of refreshments, and became very hilarious.

About a half-hour later the prisoner saw a gaudily dressed Mexican pause near the hut and place a small iron furnace upon the adobe pavement and ignite a fire within it. Then he thrust a small bar of iron into the coals and heated the metal to a bright red.

Before Powell could divine the object of this, Evil Eye strode to the hut, his followers at his heels.

"Arise! Your doom is sealed and the executioner is waiting," said he, and a malicious chuckle escaped his lips.

"Remember that I have comrades who will avenge my death. I am an American officer and demand a soldier's death," returned Powell.

"You shall have the death we prepare for you cowardly American dogs. You're an officer, eh? You're one of the hounds that follow us whenever we choose to cross the Rio Grande to borrow a few head of Texas cattle? Ha! ha! ha! Glad to know it. Here, Sancho; heat the iron until 'tis almost melted! I'll fix you, my fine fellow. You interfered with me and my intended wife. I'll warrant that you'll never see to interfere with any one again," cried Evil Eye.

"Your intended wife?" said Powell, with a look of contempt. "That fair girl your wife? The dove mate with the

hawk? The lamb with the wolf? Monster, your crimes are known throughout the States. Your hands are red with the blood of your victims, but I implore you to spare that poor girl. Return her to her sorrowing parents. My life is in your hands. Take it, but add not another crime to your blackened soul."

Evil Eye's face was convulsed with rage. His fiendish eye fairly blazed in the light of the flames of the iron furnace.

"Seize that red-hot iron!" he yelled to the grinning Mexican at his side. "Drag out that American! Burn out his eyes! Burn deep into the sockets! 'Tis the brand of Evil Eye!"

CHAPTER IV.

DON COSTA'S TREACHERY.

UPON the right bank of a wide stream emptying into the west fork of the Nueces River was the large cattle ranch and plantation of Bryan Walters.

Crockett county, in Texas, is a vast tract of territory, over which countless herds of cattle roam at large attended by the rancheros in the employ of their various owners. The herds are distinguished by the brands, and are thus identified when the annual count is taken of the animals. It is mostly to this and the adjoining county that the Mexican cattle-thieves confine their operations, running off immense numbers of steers and mustangs.

Bryan Walters was a widower with an only child—a lovely maiden of scarcely nineteen summers, and the image of an angel mother whose memory Bryan Walters cherished as a priceless legacy. He had fondly watched over his little girl, year after year, until she grew into budding womanhood. His hopes were centered in his darling, and Winona returned the affections of her father tenfold.

The day before the opening of our story both father and daughter sat within the cosey little parlor, and opposite Bryan Walters was a remarkable personage. He was remarkable because the cast of his features was such as would impress a beholder. This person was tall and dark-featured. His coarse, black hair fell upon his shoulders in profusion. His lips were thin and almost hidden beneath the dark mustache growing upon the upper lip. The singular feature was the eyes. One

seemed restless and the other passive, giving him an odd appearance.

He was attired in dark velveteen garments decorated with lace and a profusion of silver buttons. The manner of the person was extremely polite, and his accent betrayed Mexican origin.

Such is a pen-picture of Manuel Costa, a Mexican planter, said to be fabulously rich, who aspires to the hand of the beautiful Texan girl, Winona Walters.

It was plain to be seen that the American girl paid but little attention to the compliments bestowed upon her by the Mexican planter. Winona arose, and bowing to the Don, gracefully left the room.

The Mexican drew nearer to the old gentleman, and in a low voice addressed him:

"Your daughter is a most charming person. Ever since the day that I was fortunate enough to stop her runaway horse, and thus find an introduction to yourself and daughter, I have visited your home with pleasure. I have but one object in view, sir—I love your daughter and would make her my wife. You know that I am wealthy and have large estates in Mexico. Now, sir, I leave the case in your hands. I would like your consent, first, and I think I can gain Winona's afterward."

"I think you will find that quite a hard task, Don, because Winona does not trouble herself with lovers or love matters. As for my consent I must be plain with you: Before trusting the happiness of my child in your hands it would be necessary for me to know more of you. You know, sir, that I have but your word for your antecedents and social standing."

Bryan Walters's voice was firm, but its tone was friendly and polite. The words seemed to arouse the suitor, for his swarthy face changed to a sickly color, and his thin lips were pressed together in a nervous manner.

"Do you doubt my word, sir?" he demanded, after a momentary pause.

"No, sir; do not mistake my meaning. It is the custom of our people to know more of an intended husband than hearsay. I love my child devotedly, and cannot trust her in the hands of a comparative stranger, though he possessed the wealth of a universe."

Don Costa arose and glared upon the old gentlemen, who, however, regarded his visitor calmly, and then slowly proceeded:

"You are aware, sir, that my child has not been consulted in the matter."

"But a parent's authority—"

"Should be very cautiously exercised in matters concerning the heart and welfare of a child."

"Then, sir, I am to understand that you refuse to aid me in my courtship by using a parent's authority?"

"That is exactly what you are to understand, Don Costa," replied Bryan Walters.

"And that is my answer also," said a sweet voice close behind the Mexican, and Winona glided into the room, and her white arm encircled the neck of her parent.

"I am mistress of my own heart, Don Costa," said she sweetly, "and I think your suit should have been addressed to me; but, papa has answered you for me. I wish to retain your friendship, but to love you is something entirely out of the question."

The sprightly American girl spoke in pleasant tones, rather approvingly, yet devoid of ill-feeling.

The effect upon the Mexican was something startling. His anger was ill concealed and his face betrayed the passion rankling in his heart.

"Very well; I accept the verdict," he responded, harshly; "I have proved myself a valuable friend to you, Bryan Walters, and you thus repay me. I have prevented the cattle-thieves from depleting your stock, and this is my reward."

"Indeed, sir, I did not know that I had you to thank for the safety of my cattle ranch. I would be pleased to know how you prevent that scoundrel, Evil Eye, from invading my plantation and running off my cattle? It is generally known that the bandit fears neither law nor the military, on the Mexican side, so how is it possible for you to hold him in check?"

Don Costa's face changed color and he cast a strange look upon the Texan.

"It matters not to you, sir, what my influence amounts to on the Mexican side. Once that I cease to interpose between your ranch and the followers of Evil Eye, you will quickly feel the rava-

ges of that bold outlaw," answered the Mexican, somewhat proudly.

"You must be on friendly terms with that scoundrel," affirmed Walters, "for he certainly respects no authority in the matter."

"As I said before, I will not reveal the secret of my power."

"Perhaps, Don, you are closely related to the person in question?" suggested Winona, and, as I must admit, I see a remarkable likeness in the principal features of your countenance. I have only the descriptions of the person and they tally with yours, with several exceptions."

"The repulsive eye, you mean," returned Costa, with a sneer; "but, no matter; I have proffered my friendship, and it has been refused. You will bitterly repent it—both of you. Remember that up to the present hour I have been a friend to you, Bryan Walters."

The Mexican strode from the room haughtily, mounted a swift mustang, and dashed away from the spot at a full gallop.

"We have made an enemy of that man, and I fear that harm will befall us in some manner," said Walters, as he gazed after the disappearing horseman. Winona reassured her father, and her gay conversation and laughter banished all apprehensions.

Night came on apace, and the shadows lengthened. Bryan Walters had scarcely retired when a commotion at the door constrained him to rise and hastily attire himself. A scream from the lips of Winona caused a thrill of terror to sweep through his frame. He dashed into the room in time to see his lovely daughter in the hands of several Mexicans, who bore her screaming toward the lawn. A blow from a tall, swarthy villain laid the father senseless upon the floor, and the bandits dashed away with their beautiful prisoner.

When Don Costa rode away from the home of Bryan Walters he proceeded toward the Mexican frontier. He had probably journeyed a dozen miles when he suddenly disappeared in a grove of native palms and cottonwoods.

As he disappeared in the dense foliage, there came a body of horsemen following the well-beaten trail leading from the cattle ranch to the river. Their gay costumes, lassoes at the saddle-bows, and lit-

tle, wiry mustangs proclaimed them at once to be Mexicans. The cavalcade paused a few moments near the grove, as if undecided.

A shrill whistle sounded from the chaparral, and a horseman emerged from the shadow of the trees.

The mounted group saluted the bandit chieftan as he rode among them and addressed a few stout Mexicans who rode in advance of the cavalcade.

After a brief conference the horsemen proceeded toward the ranch of Bryan Walters. When near the house the troop dismounted, and crept forward like a group of Apaches.

Within the house there reigned a death-like stillness. The Mexican bandit leader approached an open window and peered within. He started back with a low cry of satisfaction. Winona Walters was seated before a small table engaged in reading.

Cat-like, the ruffian sprung into the room. A piercing scream broke from Winona's lips as she saw the dreaded form and features of Evil Eye, and recalled the words of Don Costa. A moment later she was in the arms of the bandit and borne toward the open space before the house.

Evil Eye's ruffians swarmed into the house, beating down all who opposed them. Several minutes later the cattle-thieves and their captives were speeding toward the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW ENEMY.

ABOUT ten days before the opening of our story an incident occurred at the military post on the Rio Grande, called Fort Duncan.

As this incident becomes part of our story, and relates to the characters we have introduced, it will be well to acquaint the reader with the affair, and introduce a new personage.

The Fourth Cavalry occupied the post at the time mentioned, and among the non-commissioned officers was a dark-complexioned young man who had resided for years in the border towns of Texas. He spoke Spanish fluently, and mingled to a great extent with the Mexican element. In fact, his comrades were accustomed to chaff him on the subject of a war

with Mexico, and, in a laughing manner, ask him on which side he would array himself in case of a struggle, which then looked close at hand, owing to depredations on the border. Rafael Sanders merely smiled at these playful insinuations, and when the jokers went too far, or hinted at the cowardice of the Mexicans, his brow would grow dark and a strange light would come and go in his restless eyes.

Sanders hated Harry Powell, and he could scarcely hide his dislike. The only reason he could possibly offer for his hatred was that the young officer beat him at every little game of chance, wherever the two young men sat down as opponents. Sanders rejoiced to think that Powell's favorite horse had been stolen from the post and inwardly hoped the animal would not be recovered. He showed his displeasure plainly when it was rumored that Powell had obtained leave of absence and was soon to depart across the river to ransom his steed.

"I hope he'll feel the stiletto of some native," muttered Sanders. "How I hate him! Curse him; were it not for him I should be in a better position here. Everybody likes him, and that is why I hate him so bitterly."

The fellow slunk into an obscure corner of the inclosure and drank from a concealed flask. The *aguardiente* seemed to loosen the demon of hate within his breast, for when Powell passed by and cheerily greeted him, Sanders, with knitted brows, failed to return the salute, and turned away with a scowl upon his dark features.

Toward sunset Powell strayed beyond the stockade and had almost reached a little cluster of trees on the banks of the small stream flowing into the broad river when the sound of an altercation reached his ears. Powell hastened toward the spot and the blood within his veins fairly boiled with indignation at the scene suddenly presented to his view.

An old man, respectably attired, was defending himself from the attack of a man in the military dress of the cavalry regiment stationed at the fort. One look at the man and Powell recognized Sanders who, in a semi-drunken fury, had raised a sword to strike down the gray-haired person before him. The old gentleman was completely at the mercy of the armed

assailant. The next moment Powell had leaped between the two, and with a stout cane dashed aside the sword in the hands of Rafael Sanders.

"Shame on you, Sanders!" said the young man, in tones of reproach; "shame on you to attack an unarmed man—and one with gray hair. I gave you credit for manly qualities, but I am sorry to see I have been mistaken in you."

"Stand aside, Harry Powell! Don't you interfere in my quarrel, or, as there is a heaven above us, you shall share the fate of the old fool who has been rash enough to provoke this quarrel," and Sanders again raised his sword and advanced.

"Sanders, you are beyond yourself. Calm yourself and listen to reason. This old man is unarmed, and you are disgracing your uniform by a cowardly attack. Stand back and lower your sword!" cried Powell.

"I'll run it through your heart if you oppose me, Harry Powell," fairly hissed Sanders. "Let me here tell you that I bear you no love. I hate you, and if you dare to stand in my way I'll redder this blade with your heart's blood. The quarrel is between me and Bryan Walters, and he who interferes is a dead man to a certainty."

"Will you listen to me?" demanded Powell, as he saw the furious man again advancing to attack the old gentleman with upraised sword.

"Out of my way, I tell you!" shouted Sanders, and the sword gleamed in the air, ready to descend.

Powell instantly threw forward his stout stick and caught the blade upon it. One dexterous movement of the wrist and the sword was sent flying from the grasp of the assailant, and before Sanders could produce the concealed weapon that his hand sought, Powell dealt him a blow upon the head with the cane and Sanders fell to the sward senseless and bleeding from a slight wound.

"I am sorry that I was compelled to strike him," said Powell, "but I know the dangerous character of the man and I acted on the defensive, as you will testify."

"Young man, receive my heartfelt thanks for your timely interference. Had you not arrived, I fully believe the fellow would have murdered me. The only

reason I can give you for his cowardly attack is because I have refused him the door of my house. My name, sir, is Bryan Walters; I am the owner of a large cattle ranch on the Nueces River. Occasionally I visit the post to communicate with your commander. This fellow, Sanders, managed to gain my good will, several months ago, and I invited him to my house. My daughter Winona expressed a dislike for the man, and upon examination here, and elsewhere, I found him to be a dangerous character to have even as a casual visitor to my home. I explained my views to him, and it seems that he was considerably angered. I am a plain-spoken man, and I told him my reasons. For this he attacked me, and I firmly believe that I should have fallen a corpse, upon this spot, but for your arrival."

"I am pained to see that one of my comrades in arms should have so far forgotten himself as to lose respect for gray hairs, and disgrace the uniform that he wears. I offer you an apology, sir, and will at once report to the commander of the post."

"Your name, sir?" asked Walters, admiring the handsome officer.

"Harry Powell."

The old gentleman extended his hand, which the young man grasped and wrung cordially.

Walters mounted his horse and rode toward the military post, while Powell walked beside the horseman.

Sanders lay perfectly quiet upon the earth until the two men had almost reached Fort Duncan. The villain then arose and wiped the blood from his forehead.

"That's the dearest blow you ever struck!" he muttered, glancing toward the now distant form. "Beware of me, for I will run you to earth like a blood-hound. You are about to cross over into Mexico, after your horse, eh? Perhaps you'll meet some one over on that side that you little dream will be there to extend a welcome to you and whoever accompanies you on your journey."

For a while Sanders stood gazing toward the distant stockade which he saw indistinctly in the fast descending shadows of evening. He seemed pondering and waiting for the night to cast her gloomy mantle upon the surrounding

landscape. Then he moved away like a phantom in the direction of the river, and once upon its bank he paused to search for an object among the rank bushes that grew close to the water.

It was a package, which he quickly opened, and from its folds he withdrew some garments which he placed close by while he removed his uniform. He attired himself in the garb he had selected and exchanged his cap for a dark sombrero. He cast the military uniform into the river and watched it float away.

"I'll never want to see you again," said he, "for when I again cross over into Texas it will not be as a servant of the United States, but perhaps as one of the followers of Evil Eye. Now, Harry Powell, look to yourself! You are no longer my superior officer. If we meet upon *that* side of the river we will balance accounts, and you may be sure the odds will be in my favor. You are about to cross over upon Mexican soil, but I'll warrant you'll never leave it again."

Then Sanders cautiously waded into the river and made his way toward the Mexican shore. Reaching the opposite bank, he gazed toward the American side, shook his clinched fist in the direction of the fort, and disappeared in the chaparral.

Bryan Walters returned to his ranch, after extending an invitation to Powell to call, should he be in the vicinity.

Harry prepared himself for his trip into Mexico, and Jacob Slaushorn did likewise.

Sanders did not make his appearance within the limits of the post when the gates were closed for the night, nor did the next morning bring any trace of the absentee. Toward evening a cavalryman brought the discarded uniform of the missing man into the fort. He had discovered it floating down the river and had brought it ashore. It was rightfully surmised that Sanders had deserted, but none dreamed that he was the villain that he was.

CHAPTER VI.

DOOMED TO A HORRIBLE FATE.

"TAKE that red-hot iron and burn deep into the sockets!"

The words proceeded from the lips of the outlaw leader, and the Mexican who

held the blood-red iron advanced to the prostrate form of the young American.

Powell could feel the intense heat of the metal as the Mexican drew near, and he closed his eyes and shuddered; but, before the ill-looking bandit could apply the iron to the eyes of the helpless captive, a piercing scream startled the group, and Winona darted forward and dashed aside the wretch with the awful object of torture. She placed herself above the youth, and with her hands covered his features.

"Oh men! if you *are* men, stay the hand of that monster! Do not allow such a crime to be committed. It is horrible, horrible!"

Her pale features were turned to the group, but she saw no signs of sympathy on the dark, scowling faces of the assembled bandits. Instead, their faces wore a disappointed look—disappointed because they had anxiously awaited to see the American put to a death of tortures. Nothing was so horrible as to touch the hearts of these fiends. Winona's words fell upon heedless ears, and only added to Evil Eye's fury as he saw the executioner dashed aside by the frail girl.

"Back to your prison!" he yelled to her, and you, Manedo, seize that iron and obey me."

"No! no!" screamed the fair girl, "burn into the flesh of my hands if you will, but he shall not be harmed. These hands will protect his face and eyes until your cruel iron has burned each muscle and fiber. Stand back, monster! Do not approach this helpless man with such horrible purposes!"

The Mexican with the iron stood as if undecided in his actions.

"Dog! dare you disobey me?" thundered the bandit chief, and he struck the Mexican a blow that sent the fellow reeling to the earth and the hissing iron fell to the adobe pavement.

Winona sprung forward and seized the handle of the instrument of torture and before Evil Eye could divine her intentions, or his minions prevent the act, she had flung it far above and over the walls toward the cliff and it fell into the glen far, far beneath the battlements of the Outlaws' Roost. A hoarse cry of rage broke from Evil Eye's lips as he saw the act, and he gnashed his teeth like a wild beast in impotent fury.

Winona sunk down upon her knees before the outlaw and raised her hands in supplication.

"Spare him, sir! Do not inflict such tortures upon him. Surely you are not so cruel as you have been represented, and you will relent. I ask you upon my bended knees to spare his life."

"Why do you beg for his life? Is it through motives of pity, or is it because you *love* this man?"

There was something peculiar in the man's tones and Evil Eye glared upon the little figure at his feet, as he spoke.

"It is because I wish to spare all bloodshed. I have caused all the trouble; I am to blame for the miseries he has endured, and I wish to avoid injury or torture to one who has befriended me!"

She raised her tear-dimmed eyes toward the outlaw, and again implored his clemency.

"Are you sure that you have not learned to love this American?" Evil Eye demanded.

"I cannot answer that question," Winona responded, tremulously.

"Do you forget the attention paid you by my friend, Don Costa? He offered you his hand and heart, and you spurned both. Do you remember your reply to him?"

"Yes, because I could not love the Don. It would be wrong to deceive him."

"Indeed! You could have learned to love him if you had tried."

"No! I could never love him!"

Evil Eye's face grew darker, if such a thing was possible.

"Whether you love him or not," said he, "you shall mate with him. You shall be his bride. If you learn to love him, so much the better for yourself, I will warn you in time that your tears and stubbornness will avail you naught. You will never leave this place except as the wife of Don Costa."

"Why do you detain me for Don Costa? What is he to you?" cried Winona.

"He is—well, it matters not to you at present. Don Costa is a friend whom I wish to favor. I know he loves you and will guard you well from the storms and perils of life. You are to be his wife."

"And you will spare the prisoner?" said Winona, rising, and approaching Evil Eye.

"Ah, I had forgotten him. I will spare him," said the bandit.

"Heaven bless you for this one noble act!" murmured Winona.

"I said I would spare him—I spare him from the death I had prepared for him, but not from the torture I have just now decided to inflict upon him. Seize the American and bear him away in the vault!"

Evil Eye's command was obeyed with alacrity and several russians prevented Winona from again reaching Powell's side.

The outlaw chief smiled hideously as he saw the result of his little piece of deceit. Several of his bandits bore the semi-conscious girl toward the building from whence she had escaped, and the lieutenant of the outlaw band upbraided the hag for her want of vigilance and saw that Winona's bands were fettered with a silken cord. The russians bore Powell into a low passageway and descended a flight of rough steps.

They halted before a low doorway and inserting a large key into the ponderous lock one of the Mexicans opened the door and handed the key to Evil Eye. The gloomy vault resembled a charnel house. It was evidently the prison-keep of the Outlaw's Roost, and in all probability the dungeon for the condemned members of the league, or for the unransomed wretches that were cast into its dark depths, never to come forth again. A blazing torch served to expose this vault, to the eyes of the helpless prisoner, and a shudder swept through his frame as he saw the moldering remains of mortality scattered upon the slimy flooring of the vault.

"Remove his coat and make bare his chest and arms," said the outlaw chief in a low voice that sounded ghostly in that tomb-like apartment.

Powell's hands were loosened in order that his upper garments could be removed. The youth made no effort to resist, nor did he reply to the insulting remarks of the outlaw chief.

In a few moments Powell was stripped to the waist and his hands again secured. Then his feet were bound with a rope and he was laid upon the damp floor.

"Perhaps you wonder what I am about to do?" said the bandit, with a leer, "and perhaps you would like to be

enlightened upon the subject? By aid of the torch you can look around you and behold your tomb, for you will never again behold the light of day. Death by starvation would be a blessing to you compared to the fate in store for you. Even should you guess for years, you would be unable to divine my intentions. It will be a loathsome death—one that should strike terror to your soul, and one that will repay me for the trouble you have caused by your interference."

"Fiend and monster! Leave me to my fate. I do not fear any death you may have in store for me. I can meet my doom like a man. I will be amply avenged, and my comrades will demand blood for blood!" cried Powell.

The outlaw gave vent to a mocking laugh, and turning to a Mexican at his side, he spoke a few hurried words to him. The Mexican departed from the vault but shortly returned with two small boxes which he placed in the hands of the robber chieftain.

"In these small boxes you will find the means of your death," said Evil Eye, "a death that will be lingering and horrible. Leave the vault, men, ere I open these little cages. Stop! one of you hold the torch so I may see the stairway after raising the lids."

Powell glanced toward the boxes in question, and his brain was in a whirl to ascertain the contents of the mysterious little cages. Evil Eye noticed the look of inquiry resting upon the features of his prisoner.

"You wonder what it is that I have within these boxes? I will satisfy your curiosity. In one cage I have about a dozen deadly centipedes, whose poisonous touch is certain death, and such a death! The mind sickens at the very thought of it. In the remaining box I have the venomous tarantulas. Can you now see the manner of death I have selected for you? I will allow these deadly insects to crawl upon your bare bosom. One movement and you are a doomed man. Your veins will be filled with the virus and your body will swell with the loathsome poison of the tarantulas. All ready! Look out for the door and the torch."

Evil Eye emptied the repulsive insects beside the prostrate youth and hastened out of the vault and locked it.

The hideous hairy spiders and centi-

pedes crawled upon the helpless captive and crept nearer and nearer the bare bosom.

CHAPTER VII.

JACOB ENTERS THE ROBBERS' DEN.

It will be remembered that when the band of Mexicans dashed toward Powell, who then stood at bay upon the verge of the chasm, a concealed person discharged a weapon, killing one of the mounted bandits.

In the confusion that followed Powell's capture, the hidden marksman was lost sight of by Evil Eye and his band of exultant cut-throats.

The Mexicans bound the youth, and both he and the maiden he had sought to save from the cattle-thieves were conveyed in the direction of the outlaws' mountain rendezvous. It was then that the concealed person emerged from the interior of the decayed tree that stood beyond a mass of mesquite and wild cactus. He gazed after the cavalcade as he stepped forth and then strode toward the dead Mexican, who still lay with upturned features upon the spot where the fatal bullet had stricken him to the earth. His comrades had departed, scarcely deigning to look upon the unfortunate wretch, much less to bear away his corpse.

The person approached the body and closely scrutinized it.

"He vos ded—ded as a smoked herrings," said the person after an examination. "Vot a rascal-looking feller dot vos," contemplating the features now distinctly exposed to his gaze by the bright moonlight.

"Yust so sure as my name vos Yacob Slaushorn I hit him mit de bullet right square in der bull's-eye."

The stout German seemed evidently pleased at his handiwork, and a thrill of pride swept through him as he again looked upon the dead bandit.

"By jimminy crackers, I vos getting to be a sharpshooter. I recommend der time ven I couldn't hit der side of a house, unt now I can hit a mans in der middle of der eyebrows. Dot's von of dem cow-robbers! Dot's one of dem fellers w'ot goes mit Evil Eye—dot snoozer mit a crooked eye! By himmel, dot make me mat to see dem fellers catch Harry Powell like dot; but vot kin one

Dutchmans do against a whole crowd like dot? I vonder who it vas dot lady is? By himmel, dot gal got some plucks! She fights like dem vildcats dot I hear tell about! Now, v'ot is to be done yet? Me unt Harry Powell com'd over in dis country togidders, and it von't do dot I go home to the fort separated midout him! I yust hided myself in dot tree ven dem crowdt come along, but I fixed one of the spitzboos, anyhow! Now I tell myself just v'ot I will do: I vill be brave like a shackass unt follow der cow-thiefs and see if I can't hellup Harry Powell unt dot nice little gal too! Here is a goot chance. I vill take dem clothes off dot robber unt dress me in dem; and by jimmie I vill be a Mexican! Dot's v'ot I will do."

Without further ceremony Jacob began to remove the clothing from the dead Mexican and to transfer the garments to his own person.

"Now den! I'm a Dutch Mexican!" admiring himself, "unt den next t'ing vot I do is ter follow on der track of der thiefs unt see if I kin hellup Mister Powell unt der lady of dem troubles out."

Jacob really looked every inch a Mexican in his fantastic garb. His obesity was perhaps the only drawback, but he found no difficulty in forcing his stout figure into the wide, loose garments of the dead man.

He now started on the trail of the cattle-thieves. He still retained his rifle, and after slinging the weapon across his shoulder he commenced a dog-trot after the the bandit horsemen and their captives.

"By himmel!" he cried, suddenly. "I never t'ought of von t'ing yet v'ot is great importance! I can't speak von word of dot Mexican langvitch."

This discovery seemed to stun him for a few moments and he stood undecided whether to go forward or retrace his steps.

"Dot's all right!" he exclaimed, as a brilliant idea seemed to suddenly dawn upon his mind.

"I'm got Mexican clothes on and if I gets in a fix I vill talk Dutch to dem. Dey von't know der diff'rens, onyhow; such fools vill t'ink I am a new kind of Mexican v'ot uses high-toned langvitch. So, dot's all right, go 'hed, Yacob Slaushorn, unt you keep your mout' open unt your eyes wide shut, and you vos all

right! You vos alvays a schmard feller, unt I guess you can fool dem greasy Mexicans so easy like eating limburger."

Jacob's complimentary remarks to himself restored his confidence, and he again pursued his way over the rough trail. Over hill and dale, through chaparral and over sandy plains the German followed the plain trail, until he finally reached the valley where Evil Eye and his followers had found an entrance in the base of the giant cliff that towered up like a barrier upon all sides.

Far above could be seen the walls of the robbers' retreat, built upon the plateau overlooking the glen.

"By der great pipe of my gran'fadder!" ejaculated the German, as he gazed upward, "how der tuyvel did dem build a house up dere? How can dem get up dare mitout ladders? Dot's only a vall, anyways. How der tuyvel can I get in dot place?"

His question seemed to be answered by a shrill whistle that startled the echoes of the wild glen.

Jacob had but time to crouch down behind a mass of wild vines, when a form emerged from the tangled underbrush and vines and again gave vent to the signal. From his place of concealment the German could see the person distinctly, and to his great surprise he recognized Rafael Sanders.

Jacob was on the point of rising and going forward to meet Sanders, when he again observed that the deserter was attired in the gay and picturesque costume of a Mexican guerrilla.

"Dot beats der Dutch!" whispered Jacob. "Dot feller is acquainted mit old Evil Eyes, I bet you. Dot's der reason he deserted. I yust t'ought of somedings. Dot spitzboo is a bad fr'ent to Harry Powell, and if dem two young mans meet each odder, dere vill be troubles, and—"

His remarks were interrupted by an incident that caused him to stare and gape as if he was awaking from a nightmare.

The spot opposite Sanders had been undergoing a transformation while Jacob was giving vent to his ideas. A huge rock in the base of the massive cliff was swinging around, disclosing an aperture in the hitherto solid mass of granite bowlders.

"Vell, dot does beat der Dutch!"

Jacob clapped his hand over his mouth for he had blurted out his favorite expression in a loud tone.

Sanders walked toward the opening and disappeared in the entrance. Slowly the rock swung back into its place, and the same silence reigned in the wild glen.

"I vish somebodies would kick me, yust to see if I am sleeping, or if my eyes is yet vide awake," said the German, gazing toward the spot in the cliff where he had seen Sanders enter by means of the revolving mass of rock. "I know vot I vill do," said he, rising from the bushes, "I vill go right away out dere unt vistle yust like he did, unt go right in. By himmel, I'm going into dot place ant dot seddles it."

Jacob walked boldly forward, and placing his fingers into his capacious mouth, blew a discordant whistle that rung from crag to crag. He waited a few moments and repeated the signal.

To his great delight he saw the rock slowly revolve and he quickly glided toward it.

In a few moments it had swung half-way around, and the yellow face of a whiskered Mexican peered through the opening.

The bandit seemed somewhat surprised to see the person who was seeking admittance. He scrutinized the German from head to foot. The features puzzled him, but the garb seemed to satisfy him, to a certain degree.

"*Qui vive?*" said the Mexican tiler.

"Yaw, dot's all right! Open der door!" replied Jacob.

"*Caramba!*" hissed the Mexican.

"Yaw, cranberries; dot's goot!"

The Mexican evidently was puzzled, and began working the lever in order to close the aperture. But quick as a flash the German darted into the opening, and seizing the unsuspecting Mexican, dragged him out into the open air and dealt him a tremendous blow.

The Greaser fell headlong to the earth, and his head striking a rock, he was rendered oblivious to everything.

"Dot's der kind of a man v'ot I am," announced Jacob, with a smile of satisfaction. "Ven I hits a man he can make up his mind dot it vos a mule v'ot kicked him!"

Jacob now seized the inanimate body of the bandit, and taking the sash from

about his waist, he secured the fellow's hands. Having accomplished this he dragged him into the deep underbrush.

"Now, Yacob, you can walk right in, just as if that house belonged to you. Now, den, be bold as a shackhorse, and brave as a lion, and you will be all right."

The German entered the opening, and finding the lever, he slowly closed the huge rock.

The narrow passage was plunged into gloom but he groped forward, scarcely knowing in what direction to find the principal entrance to the robbers' stronghold on the cliff above.

CHAPTER VIII. AN ALARMING DISCOVERY.

WHEN Sanders entered the passageway he proceeded upward by means of a winding stairway of rough slabs and timbers. He spoke a few words to the guardian of the entrance, previous to mounting the stairway, and from that worthy he obtained a lantern that served to illumine the difficult ascent and aid him to pick his way over the uneven roadway. He toiled slowly upward and had barely emerged into a large circular chamber when the sound of many voices fell upon his ears. A moment later and the well known form of the cattle-thief appeared from an opening in the side of the rocky walls. Evil Eye extended his hand to the new-comer and both rascals greeted each other warmly.

"I heard that you were here," said Evil Eye, "and I am pleased to have you among us. I have just returned from over the river and I feel highly elated over the plunder I've bagged."

"Glad to hear of it," said Sanders. "I hope I will have a hand in the next excursion. I've been here almost a day and a night awaiting your return. Thanks to our previous acquaintance and friendship, I was enabled to make my way here, gain admittance and make myself at home until your return."

"Consider the Vultures' Roost your home, and I am glad to add you to the Vultures of the Rio Grande as your countrymen call us."

"Not my countrymen!" said Sanders hotly. "My mother was a Castilian and my father a native of Texas when that

State was under Spanish rule and ere she was wrested from Mexico. I bear the Americans no love, I assure you. I have borne their ridicule for years, because my heart and sympathies were with Mexico. True, I entered the American army but it was because it afforded easy times, good pay, and allowed me to be near my countrymen. But I have turned my back upon the United States forever."

"I'm glad of it. But tell me, why do you come to me instead of making your way to some Mexican city and there mingle with the gay population; why do you prefer a life in the saddle and among the mountain retreats?"

The robber chief glanced half-suspiciously at the new addition to his ranks.

"Because I have an object in view," declared Sanders. "Were I to seek the cities I should be cheated of the revenge I contemplate. Joining your Vultures I will enjoy the wild, free, and reckless life that my heart yearns for. I will be near the object of my hatred, and sooner or later my vengeance will be satisfied."

"Who is the object of your enmity?"

"An American stationed at Fort Duncan—Harry Powell!"

Evil Eye started; then a strange smile flitted across his hyena-like features.

"Harry Powell? Then I have news for you! The very man you seek is beneath the rocky flooring of the next cavern—my prisoner!"

Had a thunderbolt exploded at Sanders's feet he could not have leaped more wildly or his features expressed greater astonishment.

"What? Powell here—your prisoner?" he cried, fearing that he had misunderstood the bandit chief.

"Yes, he is here, doomed to an awful death. Even now the horrible device employed for his destruction is at work, and he is perhaps a corpse."

"Oh, the news is too good to be true," Sanders exclaimed in a delirium of joy. "Can I see him? Can I behold him with my own eyes, to know that my enemy is here—here in your power and doomed to die?"

"Is not my word sufficient? I hate the man, and good cause I have for so doing. I tell you he will never see daylight again. He is bound hand and foot in a vault, cut out of the solid rock and prepared expressly as an execution cham-

ber. He lies there surrounded by centipedes and tarantulas, which are even now crawling upon his bare bosom—poisoning the flesh at every puncture, sending the deadly virus into every vein. You know the effects of the sting of a tarantula? You know that the bite and very touch of the centipede is far more poisonous than the scorpion; why then doubt that the man must die surrounded by such horrible insects?"

"I do not doubt it; I merely want to listen at the door of the vault—listen to his cries and then allow him to either look upon me or know that I am near. I wish to mock his groans of agony—to taunt him with my presence, and remind him of my oath of vengeance. I want to make his dying moments a perfect hell if I can."

The face of the scoundrel grew livid as he uttered the threat.

"Never fear; he is enduring a world of torments, at the present moment. You may go and listen at the entrance if you choose, but I will not consent to open the door. Here, Manedo, show this gentleman to the prison vault of the American."

The Mexican attendant bowed and motioned Sanders to follow, which Sanders did readily.

Evil Eye, followed by the remainder of his comrades, sought a large chamber where a blazing fire dispelled the chilly cavern atmosphere.

While the cattle-thieves regaled themselves with *aguardiente* and some *frijoles*, Evil Eye stepped into the small chamber set apart for his private use, and began to change his attire. He robed himself in a gorgous suit of dark blue velvet, trimmed with silver lace, and a profusion of buttons composed of the same shining metal. He wrapped a brilliant scarf about his waist, and having perched a gaudy sombrero upon his head, was ready for inspection.

"Now, then, to visit my fair captive," said he. "I will bandy no words with her. Why should I? Why should the King of the Cattle Thieves allow a woman to swerve him from his purpose? No! she shall be mine, and tears or entreaties will avail her naught. My mind is made up and I will act quickly."

He passed out of the apartment into a passage leading toward the adobe build-

ing upon the plaza of his mountain fortress.

While the leader of the cattle-thieves is pursuing his way toward the prison hut of his beautiful prisoner, we will follow the footsteps of our German friend, Jacob Slaushorn.

Muttering to himself, and cursing the intense gloom that pervaded the place, he slowly groped forward until he reached a spot in the side of the passage where several planks lay upon bowlders as if to prevent incursions in that direction. Jacob had scarcely touched the planks when his foot slipped and he fell against the timber in such a manner that the planks were displaced, and both Jacob and the wooden barrier were hurled into a deep pit.

He floundered about in the depths of this pit, having escaped with a few bruises, but no broken bones.

"V'ot a fools I am! Dem boards vas placed across dot places yust so dot nobodies vould fall in—unt I had to go yust like a fool and fall mineself in. Dot's a vonder dot I don't got my het broke unt my backbones smashed. Vere der tuyvil am I? Dot's so dark by dis place dot I can't see my face right before my noses. I must got out some kind of way, anyhow."

Suiting the words to the action, he commenced creeping forward.

He noticed that, as he proceeded, the way inclined upward very much after the manner of a log "shoot." Upward he toiled, grasping at projections, securing a footing here and there, until he finally paused, blowing like a steam engine.

"Mincg racious! v'ot a kind for place is dot? I've been climbing up now for more as a half-hour, unt I can't see vere I am going, yet. If I keep on climbing dis vay I vill get close by heaven or der sky, because it is up in his vay. Vell, I start again."

Jacob once more began his arduous ascent and thus endeavor to seek an outlet. He finally paused again, for a mass of rock barred further progress in that direction.

"I'm dished again!" he growled; "after all my climbing up, I can't get out. I vonder if I couldn't find a mouse-hole some place vere I could creep in?"

He felt around in all directions. Noth-

ing greeted the touch of his hands but the cold, damp rock directly in advance. Large irregular masses of stone interlocked as if some upheaval had thus thrown the mass in wild confusion, yet presenting a formidable wall and barrier fashioned by the hands of nature.

As Jacob was groping about near the base of this wall his hand came in contact with an object which he instinctively grasped. It proved to be an implement resembling a pick-ax or old-fashioned mattock.

He was able to determine this much by the sense of touch and examination. This discovery prompted him to another one—for he felt in the pockets of the dead Mexican's clothing, which he wore, and to his great joy he found several matches and a coil of some material which proved to be a thin waxen taper or fuse. In a few moments he had struck a light, and the flame of the taper disclosed the strange spot where he now found himself, revealing the rugged barrier of dark granite.

Even as he listened to the sputtering taper his ears suddenly caught the faint sound of a human voice—a subdued groan, coming apparently from beyond the rocky barrier. Once again the sound came distinctly to his listening ears; then he drew nearer to the wall, and in a low voice he called:

"Who's in dot?"

"Is that you, Jacob?" came the faint reply. "Help me or I'm a dead man. It's I—Harry Powell. I'm in this vault, bound hand and foot."

CHAPTER IX. OUT OF THE TOILS.

JACOB almost sunk to the earth with astonishment at the call of the well-known voice.

"Ish dot you, lesstenant?"

"Yes, Jacob; for the love of Heaven, aid me. I am surrounded by poisonous insects, and cannot defend myself," came the reply from beyond the wall.

"Hold on a minute, Mister Powell; don't let dem bite you till I come inside, den I knock de'r brains out mit dis pick-axes v'at I got."

He placed the taper coil upon the ground, and then with the old broken mattock he began dislodging the loosened masses of the wall.

One by one the pieces of granite gave way, at length disclosing an aperture sufficiently large to admit the German.

Eagerly he seized the light, and crawled through the opening into the vault, but started back with a low cry of horror. His eyes fairly leaped from their sockets, as he viewed the spectacle revealed. Upon the floor lay the young lieutenant, with bared bosom and both hands and feet firmly secured.

But what caused the exclamation of horror was the loathsome objects that crawled about the body of the prostrate man.

Large, hairy spiders—large as a man's fist—crawled about upon the helpless man. Then the repulsive centipedes glided here and there, seeking the bare flesh of the victim.

The rays of the light interrupted the horrible insects, and they paused as if petrified. Their little green, fiery eyes flashed back the light of the candle.

Jacob did not really know the dangerous creatures he had to deal with, for he plucked the ugly spiders from the body of the young man and crushed the insects beneath his heels.

Ere he began his wholesale extermination of the deadly creatures, a violent blow upon the heavy door of the vault startled both men.

Some one was trying the door and vainly endeavoring to force it open.

"Someboddies is going to open dot door," cried Jacob, in tones of alarm. "Unt you unt I vill be cotched unt scooped in again. Holt on, I guess I got me a knife yet."

"Twas a fruitless search, however, for Jacob suddenly remembered that it was another man's garments which now graced his form, consequently his knife was left with his cast-off clothing at the time of exchange.

The noise at the door and confused hum of voices warned him that a few moments yet remained to act or all would be lost.

Jacob seized the ropes binding the limbs of the youth and tore at them wildly, until he cast the fragments upon the floor, and Powell stood erect, free from his ligatures.

Not a moment too soon, for a key was inserted into the lock.

"This vay; come!" cried Jacob, ex-

citedly, and he forced Powell into the aperture and quickly followed the disappearing figure.

Just as the German entered the opening in the wall, the door of the vault opened and Sanders, followed by a dozen fierce-looking bandits, leaped into the cell. Sanders held the torch in such a manner that the entire chamber was revealed to his gaze.

The prisoner was gone!

Sanders gave vent to an unearthly yell of fury.

"Just as I thought!" he cried, vehemently. "Evil Eye wouldn't listen to me. I told him I heard voices in the vault. See! the tarantulas are crushed and there is— Ha! what's this?"

The villain's eyes rested upon the broken wall and the passage forced by the German.

"That's it! Some one's helped him to escape! Into that passage, boys! They can't escape. We've got them in a trap, after all."

With diabolical yells, the Mexicans dashed toward the aperture, and the foremost ruffian had scarcely peered into the opening when a pistol cracked from the gloom beyond, and the bandit fell backward into the vault with a stream of blood flowing upon his swarthy features.

Another howl from the group of ruffians rung through the vault, and ere the cry had ceased to echo, the form of Evil Eye leaped into the cell.

Comprehending the situation, he appeared more like a wild beast than a human being. His cry resembled the screech of the panther, and even his followers quailed before the towering passion of their leader.

"Why do you stand here?" he yelled. "Follow upon the track of the American and bring him back, dead or alive."

It needed but the voice of their leader to instill courage into their hearts. The next moment they swarmed through the narrow opening, and followed upon the track of the fugitives.

Sanders followed, with his torch, but Evil Eye remained in the vault, peering through the opening, and shouting after the bandits, ever and anon rising and pacing to and fro like an imprisoned tiger in its cage.

He trod upon the tarantula, and crushed the creeping centipedes that had es-

caped Jacob's heels. He crushed them viciously for failing to perform the deadly work allotted to them.

Suddenly he remembered that the fugitives might distance the bandits, and reach the exit of the lower passages. He remembered the shoot, although it had never been called into use by his followers. Evil Eye had explored every nook and corner of the old Aztec ruins, and he knew that the shoot led to the lower passages. In a frenzied manner he bounded up the steps, out of the vault, and into the rocky corridor, signaling as he ran, until his banditti appeared and gathered around him.

In a few hurried words Evil Eye explained the situation to his followers, and the outlaw group dashed into various passages, arming themselves hastily, and rejoined their leader. The howling pack sped away after their chieftain down the winding roadway, echoing his shouts, and doing all in their power to make the occasion a pandemonium of unearthly cries. The foremost ruffian brandished a torch, and led the way over the broken flight of long natural steps.

Meanwhile, Jacob and Harry sped downward in their precipitate flight; only once did the German pause and that was to send a bullet into the group he saw at the opening in the barrier.

"Come along quick, lieutenant!" he cried. "Jump down like a cat. Don't mind if you broke your neck—dot's nottings; better broke your neck as get once more a pris'ner by dem loafers. Jump! Dot's right—make right avay haste. I know vere I think yo can get out of dis tuyvil's nest."

Jacob having extinguished his taper, leaped here and there in the gloom at a frightful rate of speed, while Powell kept close behind his guide, listening to his rapid instructions and totally guided by his voice. The sound of the pursuing bandits came from above and large stones dislodged by the pursuers came rattling down the shoot, fortunately doing no harm to the fugitives, but only serving to accelerate their speed.

"Here ve are in der pit vere I first fell into. I knows der places by der planks. Now it ain't high to climb and ve must try it. I vill yust strike a match und den blow it out quick. Look out now. Ven I strike der match look out mit your eyes

for a goat places to climb, and den, go for it like a goat feller!"

Jacob struck the match upon his clothing and a momentary gleam disclosed the pit and both men hastily noted the only mode of emerging from the cavity.

Again the place was plunged into profound gloom. Far up the shoot a red light arose and fell. It was the bandits coming down carefully, and shouting at every step.

"Up ve go!" cried Jacob, and the next moment the German was clutching at the rocks and climbing up out of the pit.

Powell reached the top first, and extending his hand aided Jacob to the verge and landed him safe.

"Goot!" grunted Jacob; "I vas yust out of breethe, unt didn't got a snootful of wind. Hello! Listen. By jiminy! dere's a crowd coming down from anudder stairs! Quick; come dis way! I didn't forgot der door yet."

Again the two men dashed forward, Jacob leading the way. He reached the door in the cliff wall, and had just laid his hand upon the lever used to swing the mass of rock, when he gave vent to a low cry of astonishment, and he flung himself upon the lever in a frenzied manner.

Evil Eye and his group of bandits were just coming into view, and their torch disclosed the fugitives to the outlaws' gaze!

Slowly the rock swung around, and a dozen weapons cracked from the robber group, the leaden missiles spattering upon the moving rock close beside the escaping men.

A moment later Powell glided through the narrow opening, and Jacob squeezed through also. Evil Eye howled like a wounded hyena, and dashed in a blind fury toward the spot.

CHAPTER X.

THE VULTURE LOSES HIS PREY.

WINONA remained within the little adobe hut and gave vent to a flood of tears. The old Mexican crone sat in the low doorway, watching the fair captive from beneath her shaggy eyebrows. A form suddenly darkened the doorway, and motioned the old creature aside. Winona glanced up and beheld the personage known as Don Costa. He was

attired in rich velveteen garments, and it was evident that he had made his toilet with great care.

Before he could utter a word the young girl had bent a keen, searching glance upon the villain.

"Don Costa, why do I find *you* here, in the outlaws' stronghold? Are you in league with Evil Eye, or have you come here to mock me?" demanded the girl.

"You judge me harshly—I am on friendly terms with Evil Eye, 'tis true, but I have not sought you to add to your sorrow. Nay, Miss Walters, I come to offer you liberty and a speedy return to your home. When I ascertained that Evil Eye and his followers had stolen you from your home, I became indignant and sought the powerful chieftain to obtain your release. I have visited your father also, and he is now anxious to recognize my efforts and acknowledge my friendship in its true light. I have arranged to ransom you from the hands of Evil Eye. Everything is ready for your return home. I only wait your reply—for *you* are to decide whether you remain here or depart."

"Am I to infer, sir, that you are to ransom me from this outlaw?"

"I am to ransom you from the power of Evil Eye," he responded, quickly, while a shade of anger crossed his dark face. "I do not know why the term *outlaw* should be applied to him, but we will not waste words over that matter. You hold the balance of power by speaking the words that give you freedom."

"What is it, sir, that I am expected to say in order to regain my liberty?"

"Winona, I have previously spoken to you of my love, and you cast it beneath your feet. You were then safe under your own roof, without an atom of care or sorrow. The scene is changed. You are in the hands of a powerful league who ruled this part of Mexico. You can not hope to evade their vigilance, much less expect to be rescued from this mountain stronghold."

He grew impatient as he noted the calm expression resting upon Winona's face.

"Did you fully understand me?" he demanded, after a short pause.

"I understood every word, Don Costa; and I have weighed their meaning, also. True, I am not now under my father's roof. I have been torn from his side—

perhaps through your machinations. You threatened a visitation from that fiend in human form, Evil Eye, and the blow fell. It is strange how you resemble that man. Your voice is almost the same. The features are those of that infamous wretch. Ay, you resemble him all save the terrible eye."

"We are not speaking of Evil Eye, at present," admonished the villain, hotly; "we are speaking of the situation in which you now find yourself. You have not replied to my question. You evade it by comparing and noting my resemblance to the mountain leader, but let that pass. Winona Walters, I again tender the love that would save you."

"And I again reject it!" cried Winona impetuously. "You have worn the mask long enough. You are hand in glove with the wretches that plunder and kill the inhabitants of our frontier. If such is not the case, then why do you associate with them? You offer me liberty in return for the love I can never give you. Nay, Don Costa, since I know that you are responsible for the indignities which I have borne, I detest you. Speak not of love to me, sir! Do not profane that sacred word. Leave me, sir! Your mission is a fruitless one. You can return to Evil Eye and tell him that the little Texas girl does not fear to remain a captive surrounded by the dogs who follow at his beck and call."

"There is one in this retreat who even now is enduring the torments of a hundred deaths. The young American who interfered in your behalf is in a gloomy vault, surrounded by tarantulas and centipedes. You can well imagine the horrible fate he must endure. You know as well as I do the deadly effects of these insects—"

"No more! Do not torture me with a description of his sufferings. Monster! you know that he is doomed to this death and yet you seem to gloat over it!"

Her flashing eyes almost struck terror to the villain's hardened soul, and he instinctively drew back, while she, like a young lioness, followed him up, denouncing the craven in the most bitter terms of reproach.

"Again you wrong me!" whined the hypocrite; "I would save him also. You love this young American—"

"I do—I do! I did not know it until

now. With my soul I love him! He is so brave—so noble! If you can save him, do so, I implore you! See, on my bended knees I implore you to be merciful and spare him from the horrible fate you have described to me."

"So you love him? You kneel to me in supplication to spare your American champion! Had he a hundred lives, I would kill him by inches, because you love him! You love him, and that insures his speedy death. Curse him—curse him!"

The scoundrel ground his teeth with fury, and his face fairly turned blue with the tempestuous passion that her words had awakened in his black heart. But ere she could reply there came a hasty tramping of feet, and a second later a tall ranchero burst into the hut and breathlessly exclaimed:

"Senor, some one is in the vault with the American, for we can distinctly hear voices. We would have forced the door, only you gave strict orders not to tamper with it. Quick, senor! you have the key and we may capture the intruder."

The arch villain, without a glance at the girl, turned and dashed from the hut, closely followed by the Mexican.

"Who is it that has found a way to enter that vault?" he growled, as he sped along. "Could it be Sanders? No! for I have the key, and the door is still locked. A thousand fiends seize the whelp that has interfered with my plans! His carcass will feed the jackals in the glen. Haste there! We may be too late!"

In a very short space of time he had joined the group gathered about the cell door, and in his blind haste he lost a few moments in fitting the huge iron key into the lock, then he flung open the door.

When the two men rushed from the hut, Winona ran toward the door. She was alone! The old hag was not visible, and the way was clear!

She instantly passed out into the walled inclosure and darted into the shadow of another adobe building. Behind this hut she saw an oval opening in the wall and hastily entered.

Down, down the tortuous passage she sped, with one thought uppermost in her mind, and that was to escape, and in some way guide a rescue-party to save her lover.

Even as the scoundrel urged the Mexi-

can, in their pursuit of Jacob and the young lieutenant, he had suddenly remembered that he had decamped from the hut on the esplanade without leaving any one to look after his fair captive, and had hastily instructed a ferocious looking bandit to hasten to the hut and guard the maiden; but, before he caught sight of Jacob and Powell at the lever moving the rocky barrier, his emissary had returned in hot haste.

"Why do you return?" he shouted. "Did I not send you to guard the young girl—what do you mean by disobeying me?"

"The girl is not in the hut—she has escaped!"

CHAPTER XI.

VILLAIN ARRAYED AGAINST VILLAIN.

It will be remembered that Harry Powell and his faithful ally, Jacob Slaushorn, made a successful exit from the Vultures' Roost and emerged into the tangled vegetation of the glen.

They ran into the rank shrubbery bending down low, dodging behind every boulder and tree clump, until they were at a considerable distance from the secret entrance ere the bandits came into view.

The Mexicans glanced in all directions, and a howl of disappointment arose from the group when they failed to see the fugitives. They knew full well that the two men had not had sufficient start to escape from the glen, and consequently were lurking amid the dense foliage that arose on all sides.

At a signal the bandits separated, and armed with the stiletto and the inevitable lasso, the cut-throats plunged into the bushes, the hiding-place of their crafty foe.

Powell and the German glided from bush to bush, until they had almost reached the outskirts of a belt of wild cactus and broad-leaved ferns.

"Jacob, we will have to separate," said Harry, in an undertone, to his corpulent friend. "If we remain together we will be retaken. By separating, we will divide the bandits, and thus increase our chances."

"Yaw, dot ish ver' goot, but I von't leave you! No, sir! I stays right here mit you, and fights like ter tuyvel!" stoutly averred Jacob.

"My good fellow, listen to me. You

escape if you can, and make your way to the fort. Tell the commander what you have discovered, and bring a rescue party if you can. Go! or it will be too late."

But Jacob remained stubborn.

"If I goes avay you vill be killed dead," declared the honest fellow.

"I will never leave the vicinity until I rescue that beautiful girl from the bandits' hands. You can aid me to save her by doing as I ask you. The boys will come over or scout along the river's bank, and thus aid me, should I succeed in saving her and making a dash for the Texas side. Will you do as I ask you?"

"Yaw!" answered Jacob, reluctantly. "I vill do it, but I feel like a sneak to leave you here by dem yaller-faced tuyvels. Ach! I didn't see dot you didn't had any coat on, and noddings but your bare arms unt chest. Here, take dis jacket unt slip it on."

All the above conversation was held while the two men were dodging here and there amid the dense vegetation and foliage. The yells of the pursuers sounded unpleasantly near as Jacob removed his Mexican jacket and gave it into the hands of the young officer.

"Now, goot-by, less tenant," said he, in a voice choking with emotion, and the two men separated.

Jacob hurried away, while Powell crept into the tall weeds and began a retrograde movement toward the abode of the banditti.

A howl of satisfaction soon after arose from the outlaws. Powell arose and peered forth to ascertain the cause of the joyful shouts. He saw Jacob speeding away toward the outlet of the glen, but almost at the same moment he beheld a Mexican whirl a lasso and the coil went whizzing through the air. The loop settled down on Jacob's shoulders and the powerful bandit jerked on the lariat. Jacob was hurled backward and another outburst of yells greeted the clever piece of work done by the lasso-thrower. Powell closed his eyes and uttered a quick cry of anguish. Jacob had risked life and liberty to befriend him and now he saw the poor fellow in the hands of the infamous cattle-thieves.

Powell leaped to his feet, and, though unarmed, he had just sprung forward to assist his comrade when another series of

cries caused him to halt and give vent to an expression of relief.

Jacob, after falling to the earth, had severed the lasso with his sharp knife and was again in full flight, leaving the Mexicans in his wake howling like a pack of Indian squaws.

Powell watched both the pursued and the pursuers until they disappeared beyond the huge rocks that acted as a portal to the glen. He had scarcely taken a dozen steps toward the cliff when the form of a female suddenly confronted him.

She started back with a cry of alarm, but the next moment her eyes rested upon Powell's face, and, a second later, Winona was beside the young American and his arm encircled her waist.

"My darling!" he murmured.

She started from him.

"Pray excuse me," said he, "but I could not check the words that rose to my lips. Since our first meeting I have done nothing but think of you—dream of you—love you!"

His tongue would say it. She noticed his excited manner, and raised her finger in a warning motion.

"Do not speak of love now. Do you know that we are in terrible peril? I have escaped from that den, but I will be pursued. Even as we stand here, our enemies are gaining time."

"True, but speak one word of hope to me. I do not regret what I have undergone if I have proven my worthiness of your love."

"I can truthfully speak the words you long to hear, because I do love you, Harry Powell. It is not a love that springs forth in a day. I saw you first at Fort Duncan when, in company with my father, I visited that military post. I then treated it as the romantic passion of a school-girl, for you had not even bowed to me then. Our next meeting was but a short time ago, when you nobly rescued me from the ruffians who had taken me from home. I love you because you are noble and good and brave."

"And I love you because you are worthy of any man's affections—a noble little woman," protested Harry, warmly, and his lips touched hers in a sacred kiss.

But what a strange place and what a

strange time for love-making, the reader will exclaim! Surrounded by foes, and in the very center of the robbers' domain; but love is ever the same, knowing no time nor place for its expression—all places are alike to it.

For a few moments the young couple stood amid the wild vines, oblivious to the surroundings. Suddenly the vegetation swayed violently, and then a person dashed forward.

Winona repressed the cry of fear that arose to her lips, as she beheld the countenance of the man.

It was Rafael Sanders!

"So, so! The love-making is at an end," sneered the renegade. "Proud to meet you, Miss Walters, and happy to meet you, also, Harry Powell!"

As the villain spoke he presented a brace of revolvers at Powell's head, at the same time uttering a fierce whoop.

The dusky faces of Mexicans appeared amid the tall weeds, and in a trice the young couple were hemmed in by the circle of bandits. Powell felt the lithe form of her whom he had learned to love so devotedly, tremble and creep nearer to him for protection. It was madness to resist and endanger the life of the maiden. The cattle-thieves would not hesitate a moment to destroy both.

Powell was unarmed and could offer but a slight resistance to the brutal Mexicans who now surrounded him.

"Bind him!" commanded Sanders. "If he dares to resist shoot him down like a cur. Now, Mister Harry Powell, the tables are turned at last. We are on Mexican soil and I have you in my grasp. As for you, Winona Walters—you are in my care, and when you become mine I will cease to persecute you. Mine you are to be and no power shall take you from me."

A form approached. Like a bird of evil omen came the tall figure of the bandit leader. The King of the Thieves arrived upon the scene in time to hear the concluding words of Sanders. A contemptuous smile arose to the lips of the Mexican bandit and his unnatural eye seemed to reflect the blood-rays of the setting sun, but a malignant look rested upon his swarthy features as he bent a peculiar glance upon the young couple.

"So, you thought to escape me, did you, my bold American? And you,

Winona—sought to leave the Vultures' Roost? Ha! ha! ha!"

Evil Eye's laughter sent a chill to the very soul of the beautiful girl.

"Yes, captain, I captured them both," interposed Sanders, in a triumphant tone. "You can take the American and I will look after the young lady. We two are old acquaintances, and I will see to her safety."

"You need not trouble yourself," replied Evil Eye in a meaning manner. "The lady is to become my wife, and I'll look after her personally."

Sanders smothered the oath that arose to his lips.

CHAPTER XII.

A HUMAN TORCH.

SANDERS felt as if a knife had suddenly been thrust into his heart. He could scarcely believe that his ears had heard aright. He had been raised to the highest pinnacle of hope when first he beheld Winona Walters, for he felt certain he would have the lovely girl in his power. But his hopes were dashed by the words of the powerful outlaw.

In the brief space that followed this declaration Sanders allowed his imagination to run wild, and his thoughts and plans came rapidly as he stood regarding Evil Eye.

"So he wants her! I have a rival in the person of this Mexican bandit! Am I to lose her? Shall I allow him to take her from me? No! I'll show him a trick worth two of that. I'll bide my time and cheat him. If it comes to the worst I'll kill him!"

Sanders thus revolved his plans mentally and he gritted his teeth as he concluded his meditation.

Evil Eye scarcely noticed the deserter, but issued a few orders in Spanish to his wild followers. Several of them conveyed Powell toward the base of the cliff. Evil Eye then placed Winona in the care of two of his most trusty men and she was also taken toward the Bandits' Roost. The Mexican brigand and the new member of the League were thus left alone.

"Sanders," said the bandit in a firm voice, "if you ever had any idea of making that girl yours you had better banish the thought at once. I have set my heart upon making her my wife, in order

to gain the large estate and cattle ranch owned by her father. I don't propose to have you stand in my way. My word is law here; and remember, you are expected to obey. Dare to cross me in my purpose and I'll retaliate without a moment's hesitation. You fully understand the situation; do you not?"

"I understand, captain! I had no idea that you held a prior claim, and I withdraw mine. I would not stand in your way for a moment."

The wretch fairly quivered with rage as he spoke but he artfully masked his chagrin and betrayed no sign of the intense hate that rankled in his heart.

"This is my reward," he said to himself, "this is my recompense for aiding him in the raids, and giving him valuable information, and often delaying my detachment in order to give him time to reach the Rio Grande. This is my reward for deserting to this side! Curse him; I'll bide my time and repay him for his threats and insult."

Evil Eye turned upon his heel and walked slowly toward the secret entrance at the foot of the cliff. Sanders followed very much like a whipped cur. He muttered to himself as he walked along, and once or twice his hand rested upon the hilt of his dagger as if he was about to leap upon the unsuspecting villain and dispatch him. At the foot of the cliff Evil Eye paused and again faced Sanders.

"After seeing to the safety of my prisoners I will leave the Roost for a short time. I must attend to the division of the cattle brought over from Texas on our last excursion. If I am not present I am sure that Cortinas will try to chisel me out of a big share of the plunder. It's dog eat dog with men in our line of business and I attend to this plunder in person. The cattle are upon his lands by this time. I will send you in command of the expedition that leaves to-night for the Texas side of the river. Several scouts have returned and bring information of herds easily off. You will command the detachment detailed for that purpose."

Sanders listened attentively to the Mexican, and finally replied:

"Captain, why not allow me to guard the prisoners? I hate the American, and want to see him die a death of tortures,

Grant me one wish, let it be my hand that will inflict the death-blow upon him."

Again was the wretch doomed to a bitter disappointment, for Evil Eye shook his head, and cut short the deserter's appeal by saying in an impatient manner: "That is impossible; no hand but mine will send the American out of this world. I have reserved him to gratify a personal revenge. He loves the girl, and she loves him in return. She shall witness how I dispose of a hated rival, and then, willingly or unwillingly, she becomes the bride of the King of the Cattle Thieves."

The bandit's words eat into the very soul of the craven, who longed to vent his hatred upon the young lieutenant. He had not dreamed that Evil Eye would refuse him the office of executioner, and the Mexican's reply burned into his heart as if the words were of the deadliest venom.

"He even refuses me the pleasure of destroying my sworn enemy. This is ungratefulness indeed," he said mentally, "but I'll be even with him." Then he exclaimed aloud: "When do I start out on the expedition across the Rio Grande?"

"In less than an hour. The men will be ready by the time the sun has disappeared beyond those hills. Prepare yourself for the raid. Remember you share one-half of the profits among you and your men. Follow me, and I will give you further instructions and describe the locality you are to visit."

Evil Eye passed into the aperture in the base of the mountain of granite, closely followed by Sanders.

They ascended the winding passage until they reached the plaza on the level surface of the cliff.

The Mexican outlaw led the way into one of the huts built within the inclosure and seated himself upon a saddle. He drew forth a small map and explained the "lay of the land" to the ruffian seated before him.

While the two villains are thus occupied we will follow our hero and his fair companion whom we last saw in the care of Evil Eye's Mexicans. Leaving the two rascals, both distrustful of one another, both cordially hating each other, to their plans for a raid into the border counties, we will glance within a small rocky chamber below the surface of the cliff. Powell, guarded by several scowling

rancheros, lay upon a mass of blankets, unable to move hand or foot.

Winona occupied another corner of the gloomy apartment, but the bandits had not secured her hands. A small table stood in the center of the room, and an oil lamp cast a sickly glare upon the occupants and their keepers. As the outlaw chief had given no instruction regarding the fate of the young couple, the Mexicans merely placed them in the strong room, guarding the only door and waiting the coming of their master. They never once relaxed their vigilance and they prevented the young people from holding conversation with one another. But their eyes conveyed the intelligence that words would have done had they been permitted to speak. Winona read the language of love expressed in the gaze of her lover, and he in turn understood every glance of her beautiful eyes. A heavy footfall aroused them from this semi-reverie.

The forbidding countenance of the outlaw chief appeared in the narrow doorway, and he slowly approached his prisoner.

"When I secured you in the vault, and left you to the tarantulas, I thought that no power could save you from the doom in store for you, but it seems that, aided by an outside accomplice, you baffled me, and my plan was thwarted. You sought to escape, but failed. You are in the meshes, and I will not trust to any one the fate I have marked out for you. No! I will attend to it personally. Prepare for the most excruciating torments that you can picture to yourself, for such will be your doom!"

Winona arose and quickly approached the outlaw. She cast herself at his feet, and while the tears streamed down upon her cheeks, she prayed for the life of the man who had won her heart's first and only love.

"Kneel not to that monster!" cried Powell. "Arise, Winona; plead not for me. Let him do his worst, and then let him beware of the day of reckoning!"

Evil Eye glared upon the young man, and turned to the pleading maiden.

"Cease your prayers for mercy. He dies! Every word and action reveals the love you bear him, and only inflames my anger a thousand-fold. You love this man, and I hate him for it. Much as I

love gold, no amount could induce me to forego my vengeance—and such a vengeance!"

The bandit chuckled as he uttered the word, and in an abstracted manner he removed the pistols from his belt and placed them upon the table, then, as he tightened the broad, leather belt, he continued:

"I have spared him from the fury of Rafael Sanders, who begged me to be allowed a chance to retaliate for former injuries received at the hands of yonder American; but I could not rob myself of the infinite pleasure of destroying him personally."

"Wretch! cease your bombastic talk. I can die but once. I have the extreme pleasure of knowing that I have made several vacancies in your robber league, and that is some consolation, at any rate. I can die much easier, knowing this," said Powell, in a taunting manner.

While he was thus occupying the bandit's attention, Winona drew nearer to the table, and in one quick movement she had secured the brace of pistols and concealed them within the folds of her dress.

The movement escaped the lynx-eyed Mexicans at the door, and Evil Eye was in such a fit of blind fury that he failed to notice the absence of his weapons, nor did he even miss them from his belt. The words of the youth made him oblivious to aught else but his rabid desire for speedy vengeance.

He turned to the low-browed Russians at the door, and spoke a few words in Spanish. Two of the number came forward and roughly grasped the young man and bore him toward the door.

"Take him to the verge of the cliff. Call all the members of the league. I'll treat them to the greatest sight they have ever witnessed. You can follow and behold the awful fate of your lover," said he, turning to Winona.

The maiden clasped the weapons in a firm hand and followed after the group. Once upon the plateau the entire party passed out upon the ledges beyond the walls.

A heavy upright beam stood upon the verge of the cliff. The lower end was imbedded in the boulders and gravel forming the surface of the elevated mass of rock.

"Perhaps it will be better to explain the meaning of this," remarked Evil Eye, pointing to the beam. "In the days of the Roman emperor, Nero, the early Christians were tied to the upper part of a tall post, and then, surrounded by inflammable matter, a torch was applied and the victim burned while thus secured. Nero called them his human torches, and they served to light his gardens. I will also have a human torch to serve as a signal from this cliff. Bind the American to the post and bring forth a torch and combustible matter. I will revive the sports of Nero!"

Again Winona knelt at the feet of the outlaw.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST SWOOP OF THE VULTURES.

WHEN Bryan Walters revived from the blow dealt him by the brutal Mexican outlaw, he summoned the frightened attaches of his ranch, and mounting the only horse which the raiders had overlooked, he rode toward Fort Duncan. The bandits had over an hour's start, and the grief-stricken father urged the steed post-haste to the military barracks to report the dastardly outrage.

When he reached the fort he found the commander of the post in a high state of excitement, and the cavalry company preparing for a reconnoiter in the vicinity. Scouts had brought news of an exciting nature; several had seen a detachment of Mexicans cross the river and enter Texan territory. The officer in command of the fort felt uneasy regarding the fate of the young lieutenant who had ventured into the interior of Chihuahua. He greeted Bryan Walters kindly and listened to the details of the attack and abduction.

A frown settled upon his bronzed features, and he brought his clinched fist down upon the camp-table in an emphatic manner.

"If the Government will only allow me to cross the river in pursuit of these brigands, I'll warrant they won't repeat their raid in a hurry. That is just what makes them so bold. They know that we can't violate their territory by pursuing them on Mexican soil. Our Government is too squeamish about the matter; these dastardly Greasers fully believe that we Americans are afraid of them!

They laugh at you when you tell them how General Scott whipped them; they don't believe it was a defeat. Heaven help them if ever war is declared between that infernal land and the States! The Texans have suffered so much that I fully believe the Lone Star State would furnish all the volunteers for such a war."

Bryan Walters coincided with the officer, and then mentioned Don Costa's share in the outrage.

"I can scarcely believe it," responded the officer. "I have met him here frequently, and he was so polite and so gentlemanly that I rather liked him. Now that you mention it, I do see a striking resemblance between the Don and that infamous ruffian, Evil Eye. I can see all the features; but that infernal optic, that's what puzzles me."

"It is very, very strange; they are either twin brothers or it is a remarkable resemblance," declared Walters; "but, colonel, what's to be done? My child is in the hands of that demon and he has doubtless borne her away to his retreat in the mountains;—what's to be done?"

"I'll use my judgment in this case, Mr. Walters. Your daughter will be restored to you or I'll hang every dog of a Mexican that was concerned in the matter. Neutrality be hanged! I'll give them some cold steel and bullets, and if Congress finds fault I'll resign from the army. I won't sit here and permit these outrages on American soil any longer—I'll be hanged if I do!"

The American officer arose and issued a few orders to a young person standing near the colonel's quarters. Shortly after the cavalrymen darted hither and thither, evidently preparing for an earlier start than anticipated by the garrison.

While the men are thus engaged we will follow the fortunes of Jacob Slauhorn, whom we last saw dashing away from the glen with a pack of howling Mexicans in full retreat.

Jacob was quite stout and short-winded, consequently he labored and puffed like an old steamboat struggling against the tide.

Now and then he cast hurried glances over his shoulders and to his great joy he saw that he was actually distancing the bandits.

Several hundred yards further on he dashed headlong into a dense chaparral

and glided into the damp vegetation in a zig-zag course. Thanks to the increasing gloom he eluded the ruffians that sought in vain for him among the bushes. While they beat the bushes and thrust aside the huge leaves, Jacob was swiftly creeping away from his enemies.

Foiled and crestfallen, the chattering Mexicans returned toward the Vultures' Roost while the corpulent German continued on his hasty journey to Fort Duncan, skulking in the chaparral but ever proceeding onward.

While Jacob is proceeding toward the Rio Grande we will take a hasty glance at the detachment of "Vultures" led on by Rafael Sanders, who were now *en route* for the Texan side of the river.

The raiders were all well armed and prepared in various ways for the perilous expedition into the river counties. Sanders had ridden several miles when, feigning to have misunderstood important orders, he ordered the men under his command to proceed about five miles further and there wait until he overtook them. He then took the back trail and ever and anon the devilish gleam that came into his eyes told that his reveries afforded him intense satisfaction. He kept his mustang traveling rapidly, and soon neared the precincts of the Roost on the cliff.

Having thus shifted our characters into new positions, we will ask the reader to again look upon the plateau beyond the walls of Evil Eye's citadel, where the brutal outlaw has prepared for the speedy execution of Harry Powell.

When Winona arose from the spot where she had cast herself down to plead for Powell's life, two brutal Mexicans seized the young girl and prevented her from rushing toward her lover. The merciless ruffians grinned at her efforts to shake off their grasp.

She had taken the precaution to conceal the revolvers in the pockets of her dress, therefore the weapons escaped the notice of the wretches who grasped and held her.

In a very few moments the youth had been rudely seized, and while a bandit placed an old chest close to the stake the ruffians bearing Powell were thus enabled to place the young man at the top of the stake and secure him by means of lariats. A mass of dry moss and straw

was fastened about the youth from his waist down to his ankles. As soon as this was completed, Evil Eye seized a blazing torch and approached the stake.

"Your hour has arrived! Look your last upon Winona Walters, and as the flames encircle your body, I'll bear her away to become mine."

"Farewell, Winona! With my last breath I still whisper words of love to you and bless you."

Evil Eye dashed forward, and had almost touched the combustible matter with the torch when Winona uttered a piercing shriek and flung aside the two ruffians that held her.

One quick movement and she had secured the long knife from the belt of the nearest ranchero, and before Evil Eye was aware of her intentions she had leaped upon the chest and severed the lariats binding the hands of her lover, and placed the knife in his grasp.

Evil Eye uttered a shriek of baffled rage as he saw the act, and thrust the torch forward. Even while his arm was thus extended, Winona's hands sought her dress-pocket, and the revolvers flashed into view; a quick puff, followed by a sharp explosion, rent the air, and Evil Eye's arm fell to his side, shattered by a bullet. He dropped the torch, and a blood-curdling yell broke from his lips.

Powell had made good use of his time, for while the young girl faced the horde of ruffians, Harry quickly severed the remaining thongs and leaped down upon the chest. In a moment he was beside Winona and taking one of the pistols from her hand, he pulled the triggers rapidly. A bandit fell before each shot, and the young couple fought their way to the opening in the wall.

Winona had barely passed through the gate when a pair of arms were thrown about her, and she was borne away through the dark passage leading into the glen.

Powell was fighting his way slowly toward this same exit, covering Winona's escape. He failed to notice the person who suddenly seized the girl and bore her away. It was Rafael Sanders. He placed his coarse hand over her lips to prevent an outcry, and he dashed away through the gloomy tunnel.

Evil Eye and his furious Mexicans followed after Powell and the echo of fire-

arms reverberated through the tunnel, and the hoarse shouts of the bandits resounded from all quarters.

Sanders reached the glen where his mustang was waiting his return.

"Not a word or I'll kill you!" growled the scoundrel, as he rushed onward.

He mounted his horse and placed the young girl before him. He sunk the spurs into the flanks of the mustang and dashed away. Just as he sped away, Evil Eye and a dozen of his followers came into view.

"Villain!" shrieked the bandit chief; "you seek to carry her off from me. Ho! there, every one of you! mount your steeds! A thousand dollars to each man that helps to recapture that traitor. Let the American go! Speed away after that imp of the devil and overtake him. Ho! horses! horses!"

In an incredibly short space of time the horses were at hand and each ranchero in the saddle.

Evil Eye led the chase, urging the screaming Mexicans to redouble their efforts. Sanders saw that the bandit chief and his followers were gaining upon him and that his only escape would be to plunge into the chaparral and thus evade his pursuers.

He leaped from his mustang and attempted to take Winona from her position on the saddle. That movement was the last hostile act in Sanders's career, for a rifle cracked from the neighboring foliage and Sanders fell heavily to the earth with an ounce of lead in his brain.

"Dot's der kind of a mans v'ot I am!" cried a well-known voice, and the portly figure of Jacob Slaushorn arose from the bushes, followed by a full score of armed men attired in Mexican habiliments. One form from among the group forced a glad cry from Winona's lips, and the next moment she was clasped to her father's bosom!

But even as father and daughter embraced each other, there came the trampling of men and horses and forms were seen close at hand. It was Evil Eye and his raiders.

"Back to your ambush!" cried the one in command of the disguised men, whom we will at once recognize as the colonel commanding Fort Duncan and a squad of his cavalrymen.

As the Americans sunk down behind

the thick bushes, Evil Eye and his outlaws dashed into view.

A sheet of flame leaped out from the tangled vines, and a rattling echo of firearms startled the approaching bandits. Simultaneously with the crack of the rifles fully one-half of the bandits fell from their horses, and the riderless mustangs plunged about, adding to the confusion.

Evil Eye turned his steed and sought to escape from the trap. At the very moment that he wheeled his horse, a mounted person dashed beside the terror-stricken outlaw and blazed away at the ruffian, who fairly leaped head-first from the animal he bestrode and fell motionless to the earth.

Another volley from the ambuscade sent a shower of bullets into the remaining rancheros. A wild yell broke from the swarthy Mexicans, and away fled the terrible Vultures of the Rio Grande in the wildest disorder. They urged their horses away in a frenzied manner to escape the hidden foe.

It was Harry Powell who had arrived at the opportune moment to prevent the escape of Evil Eye and rid the Texans of the greatest scourge that ever infested the border.

Powell was soon beside Winona, and the young couple greeted each other with undisguised tokens of love.

Then came the cordial greetings of the Colonel of the Fourth Cavalry and the "Mexicanized" members of his company. Then Jacob stepped forward and wrung Powell's hand in a paroxysm of unbound-ed joy.

"There lies the notorious outlaw," said Bryan Walters. "Now, gentlemen, see for yourselves the resemblance between Don Costa and Evil eye."

The group approached the dead bandit and a cry of astonishment came from each beholder.

In the fall from the saddle of his steed Evil Eye had displaced that awful optic that had won for him the name that made him famous—or rather infamous. *It was of glass.*

The artificial eye lay close beside his repulsive features, broken into fragments. This was the outlaw's disguise. Having lost an eye the wily rascal saw an opportunity to improve the calamity, by wearing one intended for a disguise,

while another eye, matching the remain-ing one was worn while representing Don Costa. By using a dark substance upon his face and a wig of dark coarse hair, he succeeded wonderfully in mak-ing Evil Eye and Don Costa two distinct characters, although the likeness caused much speculation and wonder. The pecu-liar whitish eye baffled all recognition when Don Costa was compared with the bandit.

As for the expedition of the Fourth Cavalry, it was kept a profound secret, in order that no complications might arise from violation of Territory.

Suffice it to say, that the Texans were not subject to any great annoyance from the remainder of the Vultures. They had received a wholesome lesson and Yankee bullets to impress it upon the survivors and their friends. Cortinas lost his right bower when Evil Eye fell, and for a time the cattle-thieves were wary of the "boys in blue."

A few words will complete our story. The officers and men of Fort Duncan are preparing to attend the nuptial ceremony that will make Harry Powell and Winona Walters man and wife. Perhaps it will please our readers to know that Jacob Slaushorn is to be the "best man" on that occasion. Should any of our readers chance to visit the military post, just ask Jacob about Evil Eye, and the corpulent German will tell you how he killed the bandit himself!

"Because I ish a deat shot unt I al-vays hits der bull's-eye. Dot's der kind of a mans v'ot I am!"

THE END.

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